

Speaker	Insert Name of Speaker
Event	Insert Name of Event – Memorial Day Observance
Date	Insert time – Insert Day, Date
Location	Insert Address Specific location where the event and speech will take place
Duration	~ 18 minutes
Format	Text
What do you want the speech to achieve?	Encourage Americans to continue to celebrate Memorial Day by telling the Army story.
Top Line Messages	People are our Army
Army Communication Objective	Sustain the Army connection with the nation through outreach engagements and other communications efforts as part of “Telling the Army Story”
Topic	How we can truly decorate for Memorial Day
Key Points	• Definition of Decoration
	• Memorial Day is a holiday that is uniquely American.
	• American spirit is decorated with optimism.
	• America can truly decorate for this holiday and remember the men and women who made this day possible.
Connection with audience	Insert your rapport building tool – Use a “How in the heck?” tool. How in the heck did he know that?
Audience	Insert specific detail about your audience
People to acknowledge	Consult with your protocol office to determine appropriate order of acknowledgements.
Notes	Insert specific detail about the event, weather, technical aspects, speakers who may introduce your speaker.

Decorate Your Day

Remarks by **Insert Name**
Name of event – Memorial Day Observance
Time – Day, Date, 2012

Introduction

The following is an example introduction. It has four elements: acknowledgements, rapport with the audience, topic and subtopic. You can modify the acknowledgements and rapport building to your specific speaker, location and event.

I'd like to thank Kurt Rotar, Bushnell's Cemetery Director and my good friend, Tom Bowman, for inviting me to speak today.

This is my first time in Bushnell, and I've heard some wonderful things about the area.

I heard about your gators and manatees and mermaids swimming in your rivers, but what really got me interested was reading about "Roger's Christmas House."

I was sad to hear to it closed a couple years ago, but what was interesting was for nearly thirty years, it was a tourist destination where people would travel just to shop for their Christmas decorations, sometimes in July.

I'm sure you are like many other Americans who come to a Memorial Day observance expecting a speech about service and sacrifice. I won't disappoint you on that, but I am going to talk about something a little unexpected... decorations and how we can truly decorate for Memorial Day.

First, it's important to understand the word "decorate."

Second, I want to show you that Memorial Day is uniquely American.

Next, I want to tell about the optimism that is our nation's greatest decoration.

Finally, I want you to know how America can truly decorate for this holiday and remember the men and women who made this day possible.

Let's get started.

Definitions of Decorate

Memorial Day was first called Decoration Day. To really get the significance of that title, "Decoration Day," we must truly understand what it means to "decorate."

When I say the word “decorate,” I’m sure it conjures up images of trees and lights and wreaths, banners and streamers and flowers. For me, I can’t help but think of the scene in “Christmas Vacation” where Clark Griswold decorates his house.

He is determined to have the biggest, brightest and best decorated house on the block. And he does this by nearly killing himself, blinding his neighbors and draining the town’s power supply.

But what does it REALLY mean to decorate?

“To decorate” can simply mean to adorn, to beautify. As a country, we’ve pretty much mastered that. We decorate everything. Our cars, our houses, our yards. We decorate for birthdays, for homecomings and for every holiday big or small.

We’re pretty good at it. In fact, last year Americans spent about SIX BILLION dollars to decorate for Christmas. That’s FOUR times the gross domestic product of Belize **[BUH-leez]**.

But the word “decorate” has a more noble origin. In Latin, the root “decus” **[deh-KUS]** means – pride and dignity; honor, distinction and glory; grace and beauty. In ancient Rome, a military decoration was all those things.

Roman soldiers were awarded crowns, necklaces and armbands to wear as signs of their valor, but our military decorations had a more humble beginning. In fact, it was a simple piece of cloth, a decoration, that may have saved our Army.

At the end of the Revolutionary War, George Washington’s Continental Army had really been through the wringer. Supplies were scarce, and the rations were pretty meager.

In his book “Almost a Miracle”, historian John Ferling wrote, “That the army did not implode in a frenzy of mutinies long before 1781 was little short of miraculous.”

Generals had lost the authority to honor their Soldiers’ courage with battlefield commissions. . . which, up until that point, was the only way commanders could reward their Soldiers. By August 1781, Congress couldn’t even afford to pay existing officers, let alone pay new officers.

The faithful service and outstanding bravery of America’s Soldiers pretty much went unrecognized and unrewarded. So, Washington set out to do something that hadn’t been done before. He created two awards exclusively for enlisted men and non-commissioned officers.

Up until that point, neither the British army, nor any other European Army had awards for anyone other than its officers. America’s Continental Army was no different.

One of the new awards, the Badge of Distinction, was the equivalent to our service stripes, but the other was the Badge of Military Merit. Our oldest military decoration for individual acts of conspicuous gallantry was a simple purple cloth heart embroidered with the word “Merit.”

After the end of the war, no federal decoration was awarded to American servicemen until the Medal of Honor was created in 1861 during the Civil War, but on Washington’s 200th Birthday, in 1932, the War Department revived the Purple Heart.

Today, the Purple Heart is still bears the word “merit”, but the medal is now awarded to those who are wounded in action. And sadder still, it is awarded to those killed in action.

Uniquely American

Decorating military service is common throughout the world, and honoring sacrifice is not unique to America; however, Memorial Day is a holiday that is uniquely American.

It is unique in three ways – how it began, how it marks a beginning and how we honor, or decorate the men and women of our armed services.

Remembrance Day marks the anniversary of end of World War One on November 11. This is the day when many other countries remember the men and women of their armed forces who have died.

But for America, we honor those who have paid the “last full measure” in May.

Our day to remember those who died in service did not begin at the end of a war between nations. It was born at the end of a war we fought within our own borders, a war fought between states, a war fought amongst brothers.

Both sides suffered terrible losses – 600,000 dead - but it was the simple act of honoring service and adorning Soldiers’ graves with the flowers of May that gave birth to Memorial Day.

Memorial was first known as Decoration Day, and it was officially observed for the first time on May thirtieth, 1868 because it was **not** the anniversary of a battle.

It was not a day to commemorate war. . . It was a day to celebrate, to decorate. . . and commemorate the lives sacrificed in service.

In America, Memorial Day is much more than a day to mourn our service members. This day marks the beginning of summer – a season filled with life and warmth.

If any of you are like me, you remember the joy of summer, and Memorial Day marked my freedom. . . freedom from books, and teachers and homework. . . freedom from long winters and coats and boots. Memorial Day gave birth to summer!

Though this day was set aside to remember those who died for our country, it's a day that honors and celebrates life and service.

On that day, my hometown, like many other towns in America still do, is decorated top-to-bottom with red, white and blue. Even to this day, I can't smell hot dogs without thinking of Memorial Day barbeques.

And you can't have Memorial Day without a parade. These are not quiet, somber events. Parades in America are fun – true decorations of pride.

Families drive to the beach, many on their first vacation of the year, and the skies over many cities erupt with fireworks that don't mourn the dead, but celebrate the season of life, freedom and optimism, which brings me to my next point.

Decorated with Optimism

The American spirit is decorated with optimism.

The founding fathers established our nation on the **hope** that the people, ordinary citizens like you and I, would guide and shape our nation to prosperity for our posterity. Now, that's what I call optimism.

Our founding fathers knew that there would be work and sacrifice if the American experiment were to succeed.

John Adams said, and I paraphrase, "It will cost us to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these states. Yet through all the gloom, I can see rays of ravishing light and glory. I can see that the end is worth more than all the means."

Just in the last one hundred years, Americans relied on this optimism to bring them through seven major conflicts.

And as Americans, we do what we've always done. We look to the future, even through the gloom of war. And with each conflict, we draw from that innate optimism to find that the end – our freedom - is worthy of the sacrifices made by those in uniform.

We are optimistic people who don't dwell on the sadness of the past. We look for ways to be inspired. We look for ways to be happy. We look for things to give us hope.

It's just what we do. I think that's why we like to decorate. We put up decorations and we look forward to reasons to celebrate.

Celebrate and Remember

Finally, America can truly decorate for this holiday and celebrate the men and women who made this day possible.

Every single man and woman serving in our Army today **volunteered** to serve. These Soldiers and their families are truly the decoration of America's Army.

They grew up in the shadow of September 11, 2001, a defining moment for most of them, and many have endured multiple deployments with honor, distinction and pride.

Many return home to streets decorated with yellow ribbons and American flags. Their lives are decorated with hugs, kisses and handshakes.

For others, they return home in a casket draped with the most honored decoration of all . . . the American flag.

They gave their service. They gave their optimism. They gave their lives.

They gave **everything** to support and defend this nation built on life, liberty and hope.

What do we owe them for these "rays of ravishing light and glory" burning bright in our hearts?

We owe **our** service. We owe **our** optimism. We owe **our** lives.

We need to keep having barbeques, parades and concerts. We need to keep going to the beach. We need to decorate for Memorial Day.

Just as Clark Griswold decorated his house with "a GRAND total a 25,000 imported Italian twinkle lights," we need to decorate our nation with our Army stories. These stories won't drain a town's power supply, but they will light up our nation with pride.

Every Soldier who has ever been in the Army has an Army story.

Every private, every general who has died in service to the nation has an Army story.

Every family member who received a flag on behalf of a grateful nation has an Army story.

Everyone whose lives have been touched by Soldier, whose lives are better because of a Soldier has an Army story.

Their stories are profound tales of loyalty, honor and selfless service.

Their stories give us strength and feed our optimism.

Their stories decorate the history of America with pride and dignity; honor, glory and distinction; grace and beauty.

Conclusion

Feel free to add thanks that may be appropriate for your event.

In closing, a decoration is more than a just ribbon, a flower, a medal. It is our way of gracing someone's memory and service with honor. On this unique American holiday, we mustn't forget that a price was paid for our freedom, but is fitting for us to celebrate that freedom today. Our celebration is what truly makes us American.

But celebrate with a purpose. Celebrate to decorate. Decorate those who gave their lives for our nation, and decorate their families. Decorate the difference they made in your lives.

Decorate with pride. Decorate with honor. Decorate with their Army stories.